



Defence Planning

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How do you analyze the present situation of defence planning?

Most modern states have some form of organisation for external, collective defence. Those procedures and processes that these states have put in place in order to shape the future character of their defence organisations are defence planning. How nations organise, explicitly or not, their defence planning varies a lot. Defence planning is in many ways a dependent variable, dependent for example upon the particular country's civil-military relations architecture, their (civilian or military) administrative planning and decision-making traditions, the national security culture including traditions for parliamentary involvement, and on the country's strategic environment and its perception of how it is changing. This multifaceted and complex subject is the central mechanism for organising decisive societal – strategic – decisions concerning both tax payer acquisitions of expensive defence equipment and the ability to deter, and ultimately fight, wars. Defence planning is important, but little understood.

When speaking of defence planning, it is important to realise that the actual processes may comprise more than the formal ones. Actual defence planning practice procedures and processes can be more or less formalised, more or less recurrent. Typically, they include the production of (some form of) strategic visions and (invariably at some point lead to) procurement. They can be predominantly military or predominantly civilian. Indeed, important elements of a given nation's civil-military relations are often expressed in the organisation of defence planning. What is meant by defence planning, however, is most often the formalised process and attempts at inducing a particular form of administrative flow with regard to the actual processes. The phenomenon of defence planning is in other words fundamentally stretched between organizational intent and actual practice.

National defence planning practices vary to the extent that even when comparative studies have been made, they struggle to identify common traits. Even so, the agenda-setting role of the United States in defence matters means that formal paradigms have started there and then been diffused in the practice of defence planning in other countries, be it explicitly introduced as formal, new best practice or as a kind of vogue in terms of terminology. This international convergence is supported through the multilateral yet informal standardising role of NATO.

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Western defence planning has since the end of the Cold War been marked by an approach known as Capability Based Planning (CBP). CBP was developed to address the radically changed security landscape, and replaced threat-based planning. Under threat-based planning, the vision of a specific conflict with the Soviet Union drove both operational and program (platform, or equipment) planning, in a symmetric tit-for-tat logic that tended towards ever more expensive and technology-heavy platforms. With the end of the conflict with the Soviet Union, uncertainty increased manifold as to which kinds of operations the American armed forces would need to perform. Accordingly, CBP replaced a focus on specific scenarios with a more flexible if abstract concept of generic ‘defence capabilities’. Rather than using planning to describe particular integrated operations and derive specific capability (platform) needs from that, taking uncertainty as a starting point required the ability to focus on the multi-functionality of a particular specialised platform. Planning under uncertainty has been the headline since under which current and future ‘defence capabilities’ are then described in national and NATO allied planning documents.

Yet in spite of this formally radical organisational shift, a central question is if and how this has affected the outcomes of Western defence policies. As planning uncertainty includes full-spectrum operations (and hence the need to prepare for high-intensity war fighting) as well as a flexibility requirement (to deal with all the ‘lesser included’ operations), procurement processes tend to wind up the same way as under threat based planning - in spite of the dominance of asymmetric threats and scenarios during the period of 1991-2014.

In your opinion, how will the situation likely evolve over the next five years?

While it is in this way possible to question the effective reach of organisational reforms of national defence planning processes, internationalization is one trend that will likely be a recurrent theme in the medium term. As both NATO and the EU are looking to ways to get more output (defence capabilities) for falling or in the best case stable national defence input (budgets), these multilateral organisations have both introduced programmes to coordinate and optimise national defence priorities: ‘Smart Defence’ and ‘Pooling and Sharing’, respectively. Both of these initiatives impinge in principle on national defence priorities and planning, even if the success-rate is less than stellar. Created before these initiatives, the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP) is an iterative procedure that serves to connect collectively agreed-to defence capability goals with national plans and priorities. It is not legally binding and outside of diplomatic shaming NATO has no way of imposing measures to address gaps between ambitions and actual investments.

As these top-down approaches have been disappointing, NATO has in practice currently pursues a more bottom-up approach, promoting sub-regional cooperation. Ironically, it is a likeminded group of NATO and non-NATO members that has set a standard that members are encouraged to follow in the coming years. The Nordic Defence

members are encouraged to follow in the coming years. The Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO) initiative aims at strengthening the 'participating nations' national defence, explore common synergies and facilitate common solutions' (*Memorandum*, 2). The goal of NORDEFCO on the military level is 'pragmatic cooperation across the *entire range of defence structures* in order to achieve better cost-effectiveness and quality, and thereby creating enhanced operational capability for the nations' (*Action Plan*, 3, emphasis added). NORDEFCO does not have a secretariat, but is organised around working groups with participation from willing countries and a governance structure involving military and civilian national leaderships.

In the *Action Plan 2014-17* issued by the Nordic Military Coordination Committee two fairly aggressive ambitions stand out. First, the ambition is to install intensive information sharing on defence planning and procurement plans in order to ultimately facilitate synchronization and harmonization of requirements and changes in procurement priorities. The *Action Plan* proposes that: 'Nordic countries will compare national plans continuously within all areas of cooperation, but also conduct a mix of bottom-up and top-down processes to identify activities that could benefit from high level attention and priority.' This agreed-to document then actually proposes to go beyond traditional national reserve on defence planning and to internationalize these processes in this particular context.

The *Plan*, in other words, point to a high level of ambition with regard to the medium future internationalization of a sensitive area of national defence policy. The working group on capabilities, for example, must 'continuously compare national capability development plans in order to present identified short, medium and long term co-development areas by the second MCC meeting in 2014' (*Action Plan*, 6). For COPA-ARMA, the working group on armaments, the goal is even more extensive as it must 'suggest armament procurement priority changes in respective nations' procurement plans in order to facilitate common acquisitions' (*Action Plan*, 7).

As NATO pushes this agenda through the example of NORDEFCO, other nations are likely to pursue the development of comparable frameworks within the next five years. Whether they, or the NORDEFCO one stand to be first implemented and second have an effect of defence planning outcomes is of course another question.

What are the structural long-term perspectives?

In the longer term, defence planning is likely to continue to be stretched between organizational intent and actual practice. The organizational intent will vary with the external security conditions. Yet even if a very large single security threat were to reemerge akin to the Cold War, defence planning would be unlikely to revert to old forms of threat (or certainty) based planning. Strategic challengers are likely to use strategies pursuing comparable advantage and may therefore seek to employ asymmetric

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rather than symmetric logics. This means that planning under uncertainty (and some form of CBP) is likely to remain a basic framework for defence planning.

The utility of defence structures, however, are more likely to be seen as an organic part of an overall part of states' effort to ensure long-term survival. Defence planning is likely to be subjected to efforts to integrate it into national security planning, aiming at underpinning domestic, transnational and international resilience. Defence planning will in this context formally be shaped as defence and security planning in a statewide set of considerations.

Traditionally, national security strategy development in the United States – where the concept and category of national security was developed in the aftermath of WWII as a positive vehicle for the new security but non-war related tasks in the Cold War – has emphasised its crosscutting, government-wide character, to include diplomacy, economic decision-making power and even development. From the 1990s onward, Western governments increasingly introduced such notions as whole-of-government, joined-up government and later comprehensive approach to designate such initiatives to address broad, crosscutting challenges. In the defence planning context this public management agenda has coalesced with a content issue, namely the group of crosscutting and complex security issues that arose as non-traditional security threats and issues after the Cold War (including transnational issues such as migration, as well as cyber, terrorism, natural disasters, stabilization operations and more).

Faced with this growing agenda, the prospect of far more comprehensive planning approaches integrating broader security issues as well as narrower defence ones is a likely development in the longer term. Many countries have already adopted national security strategy processes and documents or comparable process-and-documents in order to generate formalised comprehensive debate across the involved ministries and with parliaments. In the longer term, these are building blocks for integrating defence planning in a holistic way.

The question, of course, is whether such organizational intent will dissolve the fundamental issue of defence planning's functional core of procurement of advanced defence platforms. It is rather likely that the tension between organizational intent and actual practice will continue, but also that this tension will itself be a subject for the organizational reforms. In this way, the trends touched upon here are likely to influence, even if in differing degrees and with the limitations noted, the future practice of Western defence planning.

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